

# Approval of golf course defended

By DOREEN CHEUNG

THE Government yesterday defended the Country Parks Authority's decision to approve a private golf course development in Shalotung, despite protests from environmental groups.

In a letter to legislators for discussion in a joint Omelco panels meeting yesterday, the Director of Agriculture and Fisheries, Mr Lawrence Lee Hay-yue, admitted that it would be difficult to argue that a private golf course could be regarded as facilities for the "public enjoyment" of the country park.

But the provision of public facilities was only a prescribed objective to be obliged by the authority when it "thought" necessary, according to the Country Parks Ordinance, Mr Lee said.

In the case of Shalotung, what the authority had to do was to examine the whole package of the proposed development against its prescribed objectives and to undertake a balancing exercise of harm against advantage, he said.

"If the authority is satisfied that the proposed devel-

opment could do more good than harm... it seems that it would be entitled to make a decision even if one or more of the objectives could not be fully met," he said.

On the contrary, it would not be a correct exercise for the authority to reject the application on the grounds that the development was for a private golf course without undertaking the balancing exercise, he said.

"For the same reason, it is not necessarily correct to suggest that the approval of a private golf course development would violate the ordinance," he said.

The advice was sought from the Attorney-General because several environmental groups were considering filing a judicial review on the authority's decision.

They argued that the decision contravened the principle of the ordinance, which was to provide public enjoyment and to ensure nature conservancy.

Speaking after the meeting, convenor Mr Poon Kwok-lim said the joint Omelco panel agreed that it would not seek a collective view of the councillors due to the controversial nature of the issue.

Unlike other Omelco

panels which would make recommendations to the Government, the joint Omelco panel would only submit a list of the pros and cons of the proposed development project to the Government, he said.

The final decision on whether to approve the leasing of 32 hectares required from Pak Sin Leng Country Park for the golf course will be made by the Executive Council, he said.

The developer has been asked to conduct a detailed environmental assessment.

But one panel member, the Reverend Fung Chi-wood, who is against the project, said he would try to find a way to make councillors state their stand so as to come up with a councillors' preference.

He said he would move an adjournment debate on the issue in April.

Supporting views included the fact that the golf course would occupy less than 0.1 per cent of the country park, which was not frequented by people, Mr Poon said.

The opponents argued that the development would adversely affect the environment.